BRITISH COLUMBIA

Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection

WILDLIFE–HUMAN CONFLICT PREVENTION STRATEGY

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1. Introduction

The provincial government is committed to reducing conflicts between wildlife and humans as part of its strategic goal of maintaining safe, healthy communities and a sustainable environment. Reducing these conflicts is essential for protecting human health and safety, maintaining biodiversity and reducing property damage.

Wildlife–human conflicts occur in both urban and rural areas, and range from nuisance encounters with small wildlife such as squirrels to attacks by large predators such as bears on pets, livestock or humans. These conflicts can cause human injuries and death, destruction of wildlife, and damage to property, resulting in financial impacts on businesses and local governments.

An Effective Prevention Strategy

The traditional response to wildlife-human conflicts has been to react to them as they occur. The government of British Columbia has put more and more resources into responding to a growing number of complaints about wildlife. However, increased resources have not prevented conflicts or reduced their numbers. As British Columbia's population grows, more of us come into contact with wildlife. The ineffectiveness of traditional response methods in reducing wildlife-human conflicts and the need to maximize benefits from public resources call for a new approach.

The solution is prevention. An effective prevention strategy focuses on managing wildlife-human contacts where they happen—in communities and regions. It requires roles for local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), First Nations, businesses and individuals, along with the provincial government. All these partners must be responsible and accountable for their prevention actions.

The Benefits

The strategy demonstrates the provincial government's commitment to working with a range of partners and encouraging independent initiatives to reduce wildlife-human conflicts. The benefits are many:

- reduced risk to human health and safety
- biodiversity preservation
- reduced economic impacts
- more effective and efficient use of public resources
- improved animal welfare

Targeted Consultation

The Wildlife Conflicts Working Group (WCWG) developed the strategy based on the advice of an MLA advisory committee, the expertise of the group's members (ministry staff) and targeted consultation with stakeholders. Appendix 1 contains the names of the MLAs who provided input, and Appendix 2 contains the terms of reference for the working group.

The targeted consultations with selected communities, First Nations, NGOs and other jurisdictions took place between December 2002 and February 2003. The ministry invited these stakeholders to participate in the strategy's development by giving their input at face-to-face meetings. The working group considered all of this input in developing the strategy. A summary of the stakeholder consultations appears in Appendix 3.

2. The Problem: New Approaches Are Needed

In British Columbia, responses to complaints about wildlife-human conflicts have usually been reactive, resulting in the destruction or removal of wildlife after the conflict has taken place. In the past, the provincial government was the primary agency reacting to all types of wildlife-human conflicts, but the number of these conflicts has been growing, and traditional response methods have proven ineffective in slowing or reducing this increase.

Increasing Number of Conflicts

The ministry tracks wildlife-human conflict occurrences annually and over time, and the data show that reports of conflicts have steadily increased. Figure 1 shows the increase in encounters with cougars, black bears and grizzly bears that caused injury to humans.

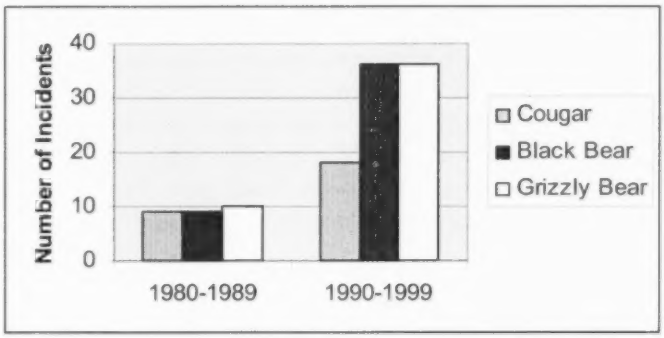

Figure 1: Incidents of serious injury or death to humans caused by large predators in British Columbia

When wildlife-human conflicts are discussed, most people think about sensational news stories of attacks on humans by bears or cougars. Far less spectacular are the thousands of wildlife-human conflicts that British Columbia government staff have responded to every year.

The Conservation Officer Service receives approximately 17,000 calls each year, and attends approximately 4,300 of these. Examples of the conflicts reported include:

- property damage to private residences and businesses caused by a wide variety of wildlife species
- property damage, close encounters and human injuries on public lands and provincial parks caused by a wide variety of wildlife species
- agricultural crop damage caused by a wide variety of wildlife species
- injuries and fatal encounters by bears, cougars and coyotes with pets, livestock and humans

These examples show the wide variety of conflicts between humans and wildlife that occur every year. While some of these could be called "nuisance" encounters, others pose a financial loss and an immediate or potential risk to human health and safety. The traditional response to all types of conflicts has consumed an increasing amount of government resources.

Human Health and Safety Impacts

Human health and safety can be affected by contact or conflict with wildlife in several ways. One is by direct or indirect physical injury. Another is by exposure to animal diseases that can infect humans (zoonotic diseases). The impacts of zoonotic diseases on individuals and the associated costs to individuals and society can be enormous. For example, when rabies is transmitted from an animal to a human, it is usually fatal. The costs of medical treatment for the rare human rabies case is expensive but the costs of related actions to prevent further infections through human contact are often in the tens of thousands of dollars. Other zoonotic diseases and their costs may be less dramatic but immediate or delayed impact on groups or individuals can be just as serious.

The dramatic increase in conflicts of all kinds reflects the growth in the human population, the growing interest in and access to the outdoors and the growth of some wildlife populations adjacent to or within communities. While it is impossible to remove all risk to human health and safety, approaches exist that will minimize this risk as much as possible.

Environmental Impacts

Wildlife-human conflicts can also affect our ability to conserve and maintain biodiversity. Biodiversity is defined as the variety of life in all its forms, and the habitats and natural processes that support life. British Columbia is the most biologically diverse area in Canada.

As a result of the many complaints received by the ministry, approximately 1,500 wild animals are killed or relocated each year. However, because of relocation, an animal may die or face a more difficult struggle to survive. In addition, thousands of animals die from vehicle or train collisions each year. This level of conflict-related mortality can affect population numbers and ecological balances. In high snow years, for example, highway and railway kills have a significant impact on local populations of animals such as deer, elk and caribou, which are attracted to these structures because they are clear of snow. These mortalities are considered when allowable hunter harvest is determined so that over-harvesting does not take place.

Economic Impacts

Wildlife-human conflicts can have serious economic impacts, especially in rural areas within or adjacent to wildlife habitat. Impacts vary from crop depredation to fence damage to livestock losses. Due to the complexity of the issue, the overall economic impact is not known, but it is estimated to be several million dollars per year.

One example of the economic impact in rural areas is the loss of large livestock such as cattle and sheep. The ministry estimates that at least 450 large livestock animals and several hundred poultry are killed each year by wild carnivores. Carnivores, ungulates (e.g., deer) and other species also inflict significant property damage on vehicles, buildings, fences, yards and crops.

Dealing with such issues after they occur is not cost-effective. If these conflicts were prevented or reduced, the provincial government, local governments, businesses and property owners would benefit from savings in time and resources.

Social Impacts

Wildlife-human conflicts also have social impacts. One such impact is the loss of pets to predatory wildlife. Another is public reaction to methods of dealing with conflicts. Often the only way to remove a habituated and therefore potentially dangerous animal is to destroy it humanely, before someone is injured. Methods used by government staff to defuse dangerous wildlife situations are never popular and can be upsetting to witness. The public demands alternative mechanisms to resolve these issues. Preventing conflicts is the best solution. People must realize, however, that it is not possible to eliminate all risks to human or animal health and safety associated with wildlife-human conflicts.

Reactive Approaches Do Not Work

The traditional reactive methods of solving wildlife-human conflicts have not been effective in reducing these conflicts. Each conflict was treated as effectively and efficiently as possible, limiting further conflicts with that specific animal, but the overall result has not been a reduction in the numbers or severity of encounters. The ineffectiveness of only reacting after a conflict occurs has become more evident as numbers of encounters have increased.

In the past, government's response has incorporated both reactive and preventive measures, depending on the situation. Years of dealing with conflicts have shown that the preventive measures have been more effective and long-lasting in reducing wildlife-human conflicts.

3. The Strategy: New Roles and Innovative Actions

The Goal

The goal of the strategy is to reduce wildlife-human conflicts through prevention activities while maintaining the wildlife-rich diversity of British Columbia. Section 5 of this paper describes the objectives, key actions and some related management options aimed at achieving this goal. The strategy will be delivered over a five year period using existing ministry resources that will be reassigned to carry out an implementation plan over that time.

The Wildlife Conflicts Working Group considered a number of inputs in developing the goal, objectives and key actions of the strategy, including:

- the ministry's mission to help British Columbians "limit the adverse effects of their individual and collective activities on the environment, while fostering economic development and providing recreational opportunities"
- key ministry strategic shifts identified in the 2003/04–2005/06 Service Plan:
  - from the ministry as sole protector of the environment to sharing responsibility for the environment with others as appropriate and emphasizing a ministry staff culture of client service
  - from unclear accountability for environmental results to clear roles for the ministry, industry and other stakeholders in the gathering and reporting of environmental information and achieving environmental objectives
- input from an MLA advisory committee, internal staff expertise and submissions received during the community and stakeholder consultations

These inputs will continue to be used to guide future activities related to the strategy.

The Ministry's Commitment

The ministry is committed to safe, healthy communities and a sustainable environment through:

- protecting human health and safety by ensuring clean and safe water, land and air,
- maintaining and restoring the natural diversity of ecosystems, fish and wildlife and their habitat, and
- providing park and wildlife recreation services and opportunities to British Columbians and visitors.

Out of this commitment comes the ministry's continuing involvement in preventing and dealing with wildlife-human conflicts that present a serious threat to human health and safety and the province's biodiversity. Beyond this commitment lies a range of

opportunities for British Columbians to work with the ministry to prevent wildlife-human conflicts in ways that work best for their community or region.

The strategy builds on this commitment through the development of management options related to the ministry's main roles:

- enacting laws and regulations to protect the public interest and provide authority for actions by others
- providing essential scientific and technical expertise and data
- developing and maintaining standards and guidelines
- identifying priorities and funding core or strategic projects related to these priorities
- bringing together organizations and individuals with diverse interests

Under the strategy, the ministry will use a variety of management options and other tools to respond to, reduce and prevent conflicts, and conserve biodiversity. Here are some examples of actions the ministry may take in different areas:

Management

- providing management response to wildlife conflicts that pose a high risk to human safety and/or biodiversity conservation
- managing protected areas with strategies designed to minimize wildlife conflicts
- setting wildlife population targets for conflict species in high conflict areas
- setting hunting seasons to address problem wildlife issues, such as reducing wildlife populations where human safety risks or agriculture impacts are high, but conservation concerns are low

Information

- maintaining a Web site with links to other sites belonging to partners and other jurisdictions that provides wildlife–conflict reduction strategies and best management practices
- maintaining a wildlife-conflicts database that includes management responses and their outcomes, and regularly reporting on the results to the public through the Web site
- providing Web-based educational material and information, and promoting stewardship by publishing best management practices

Technical Support

- providing scientific expertise and supporting research emphasizing wildlife–human conflict prevention policies and procedures
- providing technical and financial support and guidance for education and awareness programs developed and delivered by partners, including partnering to develop the Wildlife Aware program, introducing it into the public school system, and providing funding incentives to communities working toward becoming Wildlife Aware

Regulations and Standards

- using regulations to establish performance standards for wildlife–conflict management actions; auditing management actions to ensure compliance with those standards; and reporting on the results of that monitoring
- setting operational standards for waste management systems that restrict access to garbage by wildlife

Partnerships and Facilitation

- partnering within the provincial government and with other governments, First Nations, educational institutions and NGOs to research prevention technologies and best management practices; and facilitating partnerships among these groups
- supporting provincial and regional wildlife-conflict committees with partners within the Wildlife Advisory Committee framework
- fostering incentives to industries that are working toward conflict-free operations
- providing opportunities for conflict response and prevention businesses through legislative change

Best Management Practices

Another important part of the strategy is the development, promotion and support for the use of best management practices (BMPs) for reducing wildlife-human conflicts. BMPs are practices, techniques and good housekeeping principles found to be the most effective and practical means of addressing an issue; in this case, preventing or reducing wildlife-human conflicts. BMPs have a specific goal and include currently recommended ways to achieve this goal, while leaving open the opportunity for immediate implementation of newer and better ways as they become available.

BMPs must be workable, economically competitive practices, tested under real-world conditions. They are subject to change as new and better practices are discovered and evaluated. This means that today's BMPs will be updated when better information is available. Many BMPs used in British Columbia and other jurisdictions are not written down and recognized as BMPs so they are not known to people and organizations who could use them. Many other practices need to be developed and tested before they can be considered BMPs.

Differences in local conditions and species may require different BMPs to achieve the same degree of prevention. Stakeholders' participation in developing and implementing BMPs is critical to ensuring that they are workable "on the ground" and in various conditions.

Involvement of Stakeholders

The ministry is committed to working with stakeholders to develop and implement prevention actions for reducing wildlife-human conflicts. The success of the strategy depends on communities, businesses, NGOs and individuals participating in the following ways:

Local Government and Communities

- participating on provincial and regional wildlife-conflict committees
- working to achieve Wildlife Smart status by managing attractants, enacting bylaws and partnering with NGOs and businesses
- assisting in developing prevention standards and BMPs
- partnering on research of prevention technologies and BMPs

Business and Industry

- participating on provincial and regional wildlife-conflict committees
- partnering on research of prevention technologies and BMPs
- assisting in developing prevention standards and BMPs
- partnering with local governments and NGOs to achieve Wildlife Smart status
- practising conflict prevention in business operations by applying standards and BMPs
- providing response capabilities for lower-risk wildlife conflicts

Non-Governmental Organizations

- participating on provincial and regional wildlife-conflict committees
- partnering on research of prevention technologies and BMPs
- assisting in development of prevention standards and BMPs
- partnering with local governments and businesses to achieve Wildlife Smart status
- delivering Wildlife Smart education programs in communities and to local governments and businesses
- coordinating stewardship activities and implementing innovative funding mechanisms

Individuals

- practising preventive actions and stewardship
- assisting communities to become Wildlife Smart
- delivering Wildlife Smart education programs in communities
- providing response capabilities for lower-risk wildlife conflicts
- researching and developing prevention technologies and BMPs
- participating in stewardship activities and implementing innovative funding mechanisms

Management Responses

Despite the use of appropriate preventive techniques, conflicts will still occur. However, in recognition of their shared responsibility for the stewardship of B.C.'s native wildlife species and populations, the ministry and stakeholders are expected to take preventive actions first in their efforts to reduce wildlife-human conflicts in their areas. Destruction of wildlife should not be the first option for responding to conflicts with any native wildlife species.

The type of response to a conflict situation will vary depending on the conservation status of the species or population and the values associated with the wildlife, such as economic

or aesthetic values (e.g., hunting, photographing and viewing). Where conservation concerns are not an issue, population management will be used as a prevention technique. This includes addling eggs of species such as Canada geese, establishing hunting seasons that reduce populations and manipulating habitat to decrease populations or shift them away from a conflict area.

Non-lethal reactive responses, such as aversive conditioning or relocation to a distant area, may be considered for native species not at risk. However, relocation in or near urban areas or outside of genetic population areas is not an acceptable practice. Relocation is not a proven technique for the survival of all species. For species at risk, non-lethal reactive responses should be considered where human safety is not endangered by such action. The ministry recognizes that removal of animals or other forms of population reduction would not be preferred options for any species with serious population problems.

4. Guiding Principles

The ministry developed principles that guided the evaluation of management options for inclusion in the strategy. These principles will also provide the framework for the ministry's assessment of the effectiveness and suitability of potential management options that will ultimately be endorsed in the implementation of the strategy.

1. Reducing wildlife-human conflicts will be achieved in a manner consistent with the ministry priorities of protection of human health and safety and biodiversity conservation.

   Solutions will focus on the protection of human health and safety, while complementing strong environmental stewardship objectives. The ministry is currently developing strategic approaches for managing the province's biodiversity and species at risk. Wildlife–human conflict reduction solutions will continue to be assessed regularly to ensure a consistent fit with the biodiversity conservation framework.

2. Prevention will be the primary focus of actions to reduce wildlife-human conflicts.

   Preventing wildlife-human conflicts whenever possible is the most efficient and effective way to achieve conflict reduction. Solutions may involve a suite of prevention activities, and will follow a progression from attractant management through to population management, employing non-lethal options when possible.

3. British Columbians will share responsibility for preventing wildlife-human conflicts.

   Because wildlife-human conflicts affect people all over the province, all levels of government, business, stakeholder groups, communities and individuals have a responsibility to reduce conflicts. Solutions will rely on all potential participants identifying their roles in partnerships or individual efforts and implementing methods to prevent conflicts.

4. Solutions to wildlife-human conflicts will be achieved within the context of finite provincial government resources.

   More limited resources and a shift in business practices mean that the government is no longer able to respond to all wildlife-human conflicts as it did in the past. Innovation will be required to identify solutions that work effectively within this context.

5. Solutions to wildlife-human conflicts will reflect the economic impacts of both the conflicts and the solutions.

   Solutions for all wildlife-human conflicts will be based on what is appropriate in terms of safety, biodiversity considerations and return on investment. Those conflicts with the greatest economic impact are more likely to require more significant investments of resources in their solutions. These solutions in turn should result in significant economic benefits to the province.

6. Risk-based criteria will guide the government's response to wildlife-human conflicts.

   Many conflicts pose a low risk to human safety or biodiversity and can be resolved through the actions of others based on government information and guidelines. Responses by government staff will be undertaken only when designated risk thresholds have been surpassed.

7. The ministry will be a leader in setting high standards for reducing wildlife conflicts and in achieving the highest levels of stewardship and accountability within parks and protected areas.

   While partnerships and individual actions by others are critical to reducing wildlife-human conflicts, the ministry must demonstrate the highest levels of stewardship and accountability. This means the ministry will not only set high standards, it will also work continually to improve and exceed those standards in areas for which it has direct accountability.

5. Objectives and Key Actions

The strategy's goal will be achieved through a clearly defined set of objectives and key actions. The objectives are all long term. The timing of the key actions varies—some are intended to achieve results in the short term (up to 18 months); some in the long term (up to four years). The objectives and key actions will be reviewed in five years (2008). The success of the strategy will be measured annually and will be published. Performance measures will be developed in the first year and will be published with the first year report on the strategy outcomes. This section summarizes the objectives and key actions; their details are described in a separate implementation plan.

The implementation of the wildlife–human conflicts strategy will be an ongoing commitment by the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, and the Wildlife Conflicts Working Group will be responsible for monitoring its success.

To succeed, the strategy requires the cooperation and involvement of provincial and federal government agencies, businesses, industry organizations, NGOs, the research community and local governments, as well as the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. Wherever possible, the ministry will form partnerships, often using existing relationships, and will help others to form partnerships with the common goal of conflict prevention. The ministry will also facilitate the sharing of information between partners and with the public, so that anyone interested in applying prevention solutions will have access to the most current information.

Objective 1. Increase public understanding of wildlife-human conflicts and solutions through outreach.

In general, British Columbians do not fully understand the scope of the wildlife-conflict problem in their province. The first objective of the strategy is to raise public awareness about the issues and solutions so that education efforts will succeed.

Wildlife conflicts are viewed quite differently in rural and urban British Columbia. These views are based on people's experience where they live and must be respected. However, both views should be influenced by greater knowledge and sharing of responsibility.

The public must be kept informed about conflicts and the effects of solutions. Data collection and sharing procedures are needed, and an outlet for this information must be established.

Key Actions

Key Action 1-1: Support development and delivery a wildlife awareness community education program modeled after Bear Aware.

Key Action 1-2: Support development of a wildlife awareness program as part of the public school curriculum, and introduce curriculum materials into science courses for kindergarten to grade 12.

Key Action 1-3: Raise the media's awareness and understanding of the complex issue of wildlife-human conflicts in the province.

Key Action 1-4: Partner with qualified professionals (e.g., veterinarians and licensed pest control companies) and the tourist industry to deliver wildlife–conflict prevention messages through their activities.

Key Action 1-5: Establish a wildlife-conflicts page on the ministry Web site that will include information on research, BMPs, conflicts and response results, downloadable brochures and signage for use by partners.

Key Action 1-6: Expand the current ministry call centre and Web sites to include information on all animal conflicts in partnership with NGOs.

Objective 2. Strengthen accountability and responsibility for prevention of wildlife-human conflicts within the ministry and in other government agencies, local governments, businesses and individuals.

British Columbia is a wildlife-rich province and living here comes with a responsibility for dealing respectfully with that natural heritage. Developing a stewardship ethic in people, both in their personal and professional lives, will help move the prevention concept to a new level.

Decisions within the ministry, as well as those in other government agencies, are often made without considering their impacts on wildlife-human conflicts. Some decisions have increased conflicts. The potential impacts of government decisions on conflicts must be considered before these decisions are made.

It would be beneficial if all ministries incorporated stewardship concepts into their management plans, sending a consistent government message to communities, businesses and individuals. Communities and businesses that consider stewardship responsibilities when making decisions will help to reinforce this message and encourage individuals to participate in the strategy. A provincial steering committee with NGO and community membership can guide these efforts.

Community-based education is an important element of the strategy. It will succeed only with the support of communities, NGOs, business groups and other partners. Volunteers can deliver some of this education, but trained individuals will also be needed. Training and education delivery will be required.

Some groups in British Columbia, in particular the agriculture community and people living in rural areas, may be affected to a greater degree by wildlife conflicts than others in the province. Assistance would help these affected groups better cope with conflicts and strengthen their ability to prevent them. This assistance would offset the impact of the effects and share responsibility for them among all citizens.

Key Actions

Key Action 2-1: Ensure that ministry decision-making processes consider the effects of decision implementation on wildlife-human conflicts.

Key Action 2-2: Explore incentives for communities to adopt the Bear Smart and Wildlife Smart programs.

Key Action 2-3: Establish a policy committee of provincial government agencies with a mandate to resolve management practice differences that result in wildlife conflicts.

Key Action 2-4: Include wildlife-human conflict prevention in the terms of reference for both the provincial and the regional Wildlife Advisory Committees.

Key Action 2-5: Explore incentives for NGOs to become involved in delivering education programs and responding to low-risk complaints by providing prevention information.

Key Action 2-6: Explore establishment of a fund to support wildlife–human conflict prevention that will help communities and organizations cost-share funding of prevention activities.

Key Action 2-7: Establish provincial data collection and submission procedures for wildlife conflicts with other government ministries and partner groups, and make that data available to the public.

Key Action 2-8: Use enforcement to promote compliance with standards, guidelines and BMPs.

Objective 3. Ensure development of BMPs and guidelines for prevention of and response to wildlife-human conflicts.

Effective prevention of and response to wildlife-human conflicts will happen only if people and organizations have the tools they need to act. These tools include BMPs and guidelines for a wide range of human activities, including land development, waste management, road safety and agriculture.

It is important that land development plans reflect a consideration of their impacts on wildlife habitats that could result in wildlife-human conflicts. Use of Crown lands on a temporary or permanent basis can also increase the likelihood of wildlife conflicts unless precautions are taken at the planning stage to ensure that the right lands are chosen for the right activities.

Another significant contributor to wildlife conflicts is improperly managed waste, which attracts not only bears, but many other animals as well, such as raccoons, crows, coyotes and rats. Adherence to better standards of waste management—from storage to collection, transportation and disposal—will reduce the number of wildlife conflicts with all of these species. To reduce conflicts in this way, the ministry will need to develop these standards and have them adopted by waste-system operators.

The greatest number of wildlife conflicts occurs in wildlife-vehicle accidents. These incidents result in the death of thousands of animals and significant property damage, as well as human injury and occasionally, death. The greatest cost to individual humans from wildlife conflicts is borne by agriculture producers. These conflicts result in significant monetary loss to individuals and substantial response costs to government and private organizations, as well as the death of wildlife. It is important in both of these

cases to find ways to minimize conflicts through improved practices and innovative techniques that help avoid wildlife interactions.

Key Actions

Key Action 3-1: Ensure that wildlife habitat guidelines for community development will assist community planners to address wildlife-human conflicts in official community plans and subdivision planning.

Key Action 3-2: Ensure that standards and guidelines for community and industry waste collection, storage and handling will minimize wildlife-human conflicts.

Key Action 3-3: Ensure that BMPs and standards for land use tenures and industrial and recreational backcountry use will minimize wildlife-human conflicts.

Key Action 3-4: Implement certification of pest control companies that deal with wildlife as a result of wildlife-human conflicts.

Key Action 3-5: Develop humane, science-based operational standards for wildlife response that meet wildlife-management objectives and will govern the actions of everyone who responds to wildlife conflicts.

Key Action 3-6: Foster development of BMPs for the agriculture and aquaculture industries.

Key Action 3-7: Foster development of BMPs for wildlife–vehicle accident prevention.

Objective 4. Develop and facilitate implementation of innovative solutions to prevent wildlife-human conflicts.

The ministry will undertake research into new and innovative science-based solutions to wildlife-human conflicts. This will be funded by forming partnerships with other government agencies, businesses, NGOs and the research community. The results of the research will become the BMPs of the future.

The ministry will also facilitate the implementation of prevention solutions by removing legislative barriers to their successful application. As innovative solutions are developed, the ministry will change legislation as needed to encourage their adoption.

Key Actions

Key Action 4-1: Undertake research and development of new solutions by partnering with provincial and federal government agencies, businesses, NGOs and the research community.

Key Action 4-2: Change legislation as needed to facilitate the successful implementation of key actions.

Appendix 1

MLAs Advising the Wildlife Conflicts Working Group during Development of the Strategy

Bill Belsey, North Coast

Dave Chutter, Yale-Lillooet

Harold Long, Powell River-Sunshine Coast

Wendy McMahon, Columbia River-Revelstoke

Karn Manhas, Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain

Dr. John Wilson, Cariboo North

Appendix 2

Wildlife Conflicts Working Group—Terms of Reference

The Wildlife Conflicts Working Group (WCWG) was established by the Wildlife Conflicts Protocol agreed to by the Environmental Stewardship and Planning, Innovation and Enforcement Divisions of the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. The WCWG will operate as follows:

1. Composition: The directors of Enforcement, Biodiversity, Fish and Wildlife Recreation and Allocation, Parks and Protected Areas, and Environmental Stewardship Regional Operations will each appoint a member to the WCWG. It will be chaired by the Wildlife Conflicts Manager of the Enforcement program and will receive secretariat support through that position. It will receive policy support from the Strategic Policy Branch. Attendance by other ministry staff will be requested where specific knowledge or expertise is required for agenda items. Appointments to the working group should be for a minimum period of two years, and a time commitment to this project should appear in the appointees' Employee Performance and Development Plans. Directors should consider appointing an alternate from their branch to foster succession and help satisfy the attendance requirements of item 3.
2. Purpose: The WCWG will help focus ministry resources assigned to wildlife-conflicts responsibilities to ensure that the application of those resources is strategic, effective and efficient. Specific responsibilities of the WCWG include:
   - completing the Wildlife–Human Conflicts Prevention Strategy
   - providing ongoing guidance and monitoring of the strategy's Implementation Plan
   - representing the ministry on external wildlife-conflict committees
   - making recommendations on changes to policy and procedure related to wildlife conflicts
   - making recommendations on management practices and goals intended to reduce wildlife conflicts
   - coordinating the development of best management practices, standards and guidelines aimed at reducing wildlife conflicts
   - coordinating, reviewing and recommending funding proposals or requests related to wildlife conflicts
   - reviewing and recommending legislative changes aimed at reducing wildlife conflicts
   - providing advice and facilitation support to headquarters and regional staff working on wildlife–conflict prevention solutions
   - updating ministry staff and partners monthly on wildlife-conflict issues and initiatives

3. Meetings: Meetings will be held at least bi-monthly and can be called more frequently depending on workload. Group members are expected to attend meetings or have an alternate from their branch/program attend in their absence.
4. Minutes: Minutes will be kept and distributed to group members for review and correction within one week of meetings and will be distributed to ministry staff within two weeks of meetings.
5. Reporting Line: The WCWG will report to the ADMs of Environmental Stewardship and Planning, Innovation and Enforcement through the five directors and will submit quarterly reports outlining activities, accomplishments and obstacles to success.

Appendix 3

Wildlife–Human Conflict Prevention Strategy—Stakeholder Consultation Summary

Introduction

A total of 27 meetings were held in urban and rural communities from Dec. 3, 2002 to Feb. 28, 2003. The purpose of the meetings was to get feedback for the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection on the proposed Wildlife–Human Conflict Prevention Strategy.

A working paper was sent out to participants in advance of the meetings and a short Power Point presentation on the strategy was introduced before each discussion.

The meetings were primarily targeted at municipalities and regional districts. In four communities the ministry invited a broader group of representatives, and in some communities local government invited their own representatives. Over 180 participants attended the meetings along with various ministry staff members. In addition, several written submissions were received.

The following is a summary of some of the key themes from the consultation.

General Comments

The range of potential solutions for wildlife-human conflicts is as diverse as the wildlife concerns in the various regions of the province visited during the consultation. In remote areas like Bella Coola, the concerns are with black and grizzly bears, cougars and wolves. In urban areas like Vancouver, the concerns are with coyotes and "nuisance species" like raccoons and grey squirrels.

There are widely varying attitudes to wildlife-human conflict. The urban-rural split in the province is noticeable. The range of opinion runs from people who fear wildlife and want all problem wildlife destroyed to people who believe that all wildlife should be protected whatever the cost. A challenge for the strategy is to strike a balance between the various views while shifting the responsibility to individuals and to communities to take appropriate preventive actions.

Many communities and agencies express concerns about cutbacks to the Conservation Officer Service (COS), ministry staff and programs like the E-Team. Agencies from Greater Vancouver Regional District Parks to police to the BC Golf Superintendents Association stated that the expertise and experience of the COS is critical—especially in high-risk wildlife situations. Even if prevention is being practised, it is felt that there are times when advice and a response from the ministry will be required.

The agriculture meeting expressed concern that the ministry's focus in the strategy on high risks to public safety and to biodiversity means "a reduced responsibility and service to agriculture interests." Because of their unique challenges and higher economic impacts due to wildlife conflicts, they request a specific component in the strategy to address agriculture issues.

A comment from some meetings is that the strategy appears to be a downloading exercise from the province to local government and non-government agencies. The strategy needs to be clear on its direction to local government.

Some local government and agencies need to be convinced that wildlife-conflict issues are a major concern. The view is that wildlife belongs to the crown and is the responsibility of the ministry. Therefore they reason they should not pay the costs to take preventive actions. For instance, while a bear hazard assessment would be useful, not many communities are convinced that they need to spend taxpayer's dollars on an assessment.

Other municipalities and agencies are willing to take actions to prevent wildlife-human conflict but they would like to see some incentives from the province. There is currently no reward system in place for communities who do the "right thing" by taking preventive steps.

Some agencies questioned the consultation process. They did not understand who the ministry was consulting with and why. Requests were received from the Web site and over the phone to broaden the consultation process.

There is a request from several groups including the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to review the proposed strategy prior to it being finalized by government.

In general, Schedule B changes to the *Wildlife Act* regulations, which were introduced briefly at a few meetings, were not well received. Suggestions include the ministry doing further consultation and ensuring that the guidelines and a monitoring program are in place before making the proposed changes.

Despite some negative comments during the consultation, there are many potential solutions and proactive ideas from managing attractants, to improving awareness and education, to doing research and taking more active steps to manage wildlife populations.

Long term it is suggested that the Wildlife–Human Conflict Strategy be looking at planning and development issues. Habitat loss is a big issue raised by many groups. Clearly the province does need to plan for use by wildlife. This may mean restricting growth in some backcountry areas. It also means opening a dialogue with other government agencies and improving communication on wildlife-human conflicts within the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection.

Awareness

Stakeholders recognize that wildlife-human conflict is a complex issue. Several meetings identified that the province and its partners need to create awareness of the problems before they can build wide support for preventive actions.

A suggestion by the guide outfitters is that the ministry quantifies numbers around the economic impacts of wildlife-human conflict and develops a sound business case for taking action. The numbers could be used with various audiences from municipalities and other government agencies to the media.

An observation is that a majority of the population will change their behavior voluntarily once they are aware of the problem. A smaller percentage of the population will not change and for those people there must be bylaws and enforcement in place.

One theme around awareness is that BC is a wildlife rich province and there is a responsibility that comes with living in this province. The comment was made that under the strategy people need more tolerance and knowledge of wildlife and less fear.

A specific suggestion includes changing the "Beautiful BC" slogan to "Bountiful BC" and building a biodiversity message.

Another awareness suggestion is to develop a "Code of Responsibility" or "Wildlife Ethic" for the people who live in BC.

Revelstoke suggests a Bear Awareness week in the spring and the fall. This could be done at a community level and at a provincial level. The idea would be to focus attention on wildlife-human conflict issues as bears are becoming active in communities and again in the fall as they are fattening for hibernation.

One comment from the East Kootenay region seem to summarize the reason for moving forward with a preventive strategy "wildlife is a part of our heritage and it should be here for future generations to enjoy."

Education and Information

Education is a strong theme. The key role of educating youth and getting wildlife awareness into the school curriculum is stressed. This is a long-term goal.

In the short term, NGOs and others agree that other levels of government and groups may be able to take a more active role in wildlife education but believe the ministry needs to continue to be involved to coordinate the diverse groups. The ministry needs to take a leadership role.

Some level of provincial funding for educational programs delivered by partners is a common theme. Suggestions include developing a community education trust fund or allowing money from the Habitat Conservation Trust Fund to provide dollars for education programs.

The Bear Aware education program is frequently referred to as a success story and a useful model to support and develop. Communities with an already existing Bear Aware program want the program to continue. Liaison with local ministry staff is seen as key to maintain the program's credibility and to share information on the local conflict situation. Revelstoke, the community with the longest running Bear Aware program, identified challenges with keeping the program fresh and developing new material.

In some communities, other wildlife education programs already exist besides Bear Aware. They also ask for recognition and support. They do provide local community

solutions to wildlife-human conflicts. Two examples of these programs would be Prince George's Northern Bear Awareness program and the Stanley Park Ecology Society's Coexisting with Coyotes program. The North Shore and Kimberley are also communities with proactive bear education groups not affiliated with the Bear Aware program.

A comment frequently heard at meetings is that Web site access should not be the only type of education supported by the ministry. But there are also suggestions to enhance the information available on the Web site. Downloadable, multilingual information brochures on species with best management practices and preventive actions would be useful to municipalities. Port Moody even suggested sharing a standard for signs for problem wildlife such as bears.

It is recommended that the province do a survey of already existing wildlife education/information programs to identify gaps. Ducks Unlimited and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation are examples of already existing programs. The options for the strategy are to work closely with already existing programs and/or to encourage the development of new program materials where required. The Nuxalk Nation for example, suggested they would be interested in educational materials on wolves.

The idea of a broader Bear Aware education program such as Wildlife Aware or Wildlife Smart is suggested. A program of this nature could cover all the species where there is a high potential for conflict with people. The BC Conservation Foundation (BCCF) is willing to work on developing a program of this nature.

The BCCF also suggests the idea of developing a manual or kit with information and resources and recommended prevention actions for each species. This manual could then be made available to municipalities, regional districts and NGOs. The manual to be self-supporting in the long-term but would require some start-up funds from the ministry.

Some meetings got down to specific suggestions on education programs such as develop videos, challenge kids with projects, coloring contests, teach the teachers workshops and other ideas.

There is more that can be done with adult education (for those that do not have children in the school system) such as mailouts and community forums. Over time, peer or neighbor pressure will lead to change, but in the meantime there is a need to continue to do awareness/education around wildlife issues.

Naturescape was mentioned in several meetings. It could have a role in the new strategy in building awareness and educational links.

The role of media in educating the public is a common discussion point at meetings. A conflict strategy should include a plan to work with media.

Tourist education is also identified as a critical need. Some communities such as Whistler have been proactive in reaching out to visitors to their community. Other suggestions are to work more closely with backcountry recreation businesses and tourism agencies to deliver wildlife aware messages.

Facilitation

Facilitation suggestions tend to be around specific community problems such as working with Hyder, Alaska on getting their landfill fenced or brokering a solution to the fish-spawning channel in Revelstoke. The East Kootenay meeting suggests the ministry bring key agencies together to work on solutions to rangeland and forage issues.

One theme is that the ministry needs to be more active in planning and networking with other ministries to avoid wildlife-conflict issues. Government agencies that are frequently mentioned include Ministry of Forests, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Land and Water BC and the Ministry of Transportation and Highways.

An example of a ministry decision that is increasing wildlife-human conflict is the Ministry of Transportation and Highway's decision to reduce brushing to save dollars. The effect is to attract more wildlife to roadsides while reducing sight lines for drivers, creating opportunities for more accidents and increasing costs to agencies like the Insurance Corporation of BC (ICBC).

Pine mushroom picking on Crown land in remote communities such as Bella Coola and Stewart is another example of an issue that may lead to wildlife-human conflict that crosses the jurisdictional boundaries of several ministries.

Facilitating discussions with the Treaty Negotiation Office to see if First Nation groups willing to take preventive steps can be funded. For example, the Oweekeno Nation express an interest in managing attractants for bears in their community. They would like to purchase an incinerator and may be willing to look at preventive actions such as moving smoke houses to one location and surrounding them with an electric fence but they need some financial assistance as well as technical expertise.

The sharing of information between government and non-government agencies and communities is frequently identified as a gap. The ministry can do more to facilitate this process and provide the overall picture. For instance wildlife population information and statistics are of interest to many agencies. The rehabilitators identified that they provide statistics to the ministry but they are not publicly available. Another example, statistics collected by the COS through the call center needs to be more widely disseminated.

Related to the sharing of wildlife information, another suggestion is that the ministry develops procedures for collecting wildlife-conflict data. Information collected could be shared back out to communities. Develop conflict maps as a visual way of illustrating the problems in communities.

Another suggested area for facilitation by the ministry is developing and disseminating key messages for sharing between agencies. The NGO group points out even simple consistent messages like "Do Not Feed Wildlife" and "Keep Cats Indoors" delivered by many agencies would be effective.

ICBC sent staff members to the community consultation meetings. They provided good examples of how they are working proactively with the research community, non-profits, other government agencies and the corporate world to reduce impacts due to wildlife collisions. Their approach is one that may be useful for the Wildlife–Human Conflict Strategy.

Other facilitation suggestions include forums or workshops to share the latest advances in attractants management, prevention and/or research.

Training for volunteers and local government employees in wildlife prevention is seen as a gap. It is suggested that the ministry play a larger role in facilitating training opportunities.

BC Rail suggests the province could play a role by bringing railway companies together to further dialogue possible solutions to wildlife kills along rail lines.

Various types of committees to be facilitated by the ministry are suggested. The NGOs recommend establishing a working group to oversee the strategy and work through the specific issues. One of the roles of the working group would be to set realistic and measurable goals. For example what does the government want to achieve in five years? What types of problems can be reduced by how much? It is suggested that the working group have non-government, industry, municipal and regional representation.

The agriculture meeting suggests that the already existing Agriculture–Wildlife Advisory Committee is the logical group to vet ideas aimed at reducing agriculture conflicts and to move the strategy forward. They are already working through similar issues.

Gary Shelton's submission suggests regional committees to review hunting regulations and allocations.

Incentives

Local governments do have responsibilities for planning and garbage management. The challenge is to get them involved in the problem and the prevention solutions. One suggestion is for the ministry to jump-start the program with some resources for municipalities. Nelson for instance, asked for a program to subsidize the purchase of bear proof containers.

Bear Smart criteria is mentioned in many communities. Communities like Stewart, and Revelstoke suggested that some sort of a stepped designation by the ministry might be useful as an incentive. As a community completes steps toward the Bear Smart criteria they could be recognized or rewarded by the ministry.

Expand the Bear Smart criteria to a Wildlife Aware concept with a ranking of preventive actions taken by communities and a reward system. Education of tourists or visitors could be linked to the ranking.

Develop a Wildlife Aware logo/designation that could be used by municipalities, businesses and partners supporting the strategy. Celebrate small community/business gains by spreading the news.

Training for volunteer agencies and partners is seen as an incentive. Working with volunteers is labor intensive and time-consuming but resources must be assigned to the task.

Offer support and financial incentives for agencies outside the ministry to undertake research on wildlife-human conflict issues.

Issues and Suggestions to Be Considered

One recommendation is that the strategy would benefit from some further cost analysis. For example, what is the cost of preventing a specific type of wildlife conflict versus reacting to the conflict?

The NGOs recommend that the province do more through certification of pest control companies to ensure that they are part of the solution to wildlife-human conflict. Trapping animals and relocating them to unsuitable areas is a big problem in the urban environment. Pest control companies are doing front line education with the public but there is no control over their message.

A call center for all wildlife issues is a suggestion from the NGOs. Need clarity from the ministry on their role in wildlife management and response and the role of other agencies. This requires a one-window approach. Right now jurisdictions are unclear resulting in the public phoning many agencies and getting many different answers.

A few meetings discussed the ministry's 24–hour call centre. While there are some complaints about the new call service there are also kudos for having a person answer the phone 24 hours a day. It is suggested that the ministry do more to educate the public on when they need to contact the call centre.

Partnership

Partnership is a key theme that was discussed at every meeting.

To outside agencies, partnership with the ministry means a commitment to more than maintaining the Web site. Items that were frequently mentioned included funding, ongoing work with ministry staff and better sha ing of information between agencies. As one written submission states "face to face interaction and meaningful dialog must be incorporated into the process."

Non-profit agencies like the BCCF and the Stanley Park Ecology Society believe that partnering with the ministry gives their programs credibility. They would like to continue these relationships. On the positive side for the ministry, the Bear Aware and Coexisting with Coyotes programs takes many calls/complaints that would have formerly gone to the ministry.

There is a long list of potential partners both for the ministry and for agencies working with wildlife-conflict outside of the ministry. Groups mentioned specific partnerships with youth groups like 4-H, guides or scouts, and other government agencies such as federal parks and Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Private industry partners are out there; but they need to be approached and sold on the problem. Welcome Wagons, Chambers of Commerce, real estate agents and veterinarians suggested as potential partners in communities.

Corporate sponsorship is mentioned as an opportunity both for government and for community organizations. BCAA might be a potential partner—they already have an advertising campaign using wildlife.

The Gitanyow First Nation has a wildlife management protocol with the Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection. This partnership aids in the sharing of information and open communication. This is a good tool for First Nation groups.

On the enforcement side, it is suggested that the COS work closely with the RCMP and other enforcement agencies—they need to be included as a partner in the strategy and have similar responses to wildlife-human conflicts. This includes appropriate training.

Municipalities and regional districts often suggest a closer working relationship with the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM). They see UBCM as a key partner for the ministry and a good way to share information with local government.

Universities are seen as a possible partner in education and in research around wildlife-human conflict issues.

The BCCF would like to continue to develop their already existing Wildlife-Vehicle Accident Prevention Program. They have a partnership with ICBC and see benefits from getting the ministry more involved in the program.

Prevention Actions/Standards and Guidelines

There needs to be more work on preventing conflicts through planning efforts at the community level. Provide planners with tools to use when developing new communities. Suggest the ministry develop draft wildlife policy to be used in official community planning processes.

Develop best management practices regarding garbage collection and storage that represent minimum standards for municipalities and regional districts.

A frequent suggestion is for the province to provide model or sample bylaws for local government. By way of example, the "feeding dangerous wildlife" provisions under the *Wildlife Act* are difficult to enforce. Local government may be able to put bylaws in place as a tool for enforcement officers including the COS.

Whistler and North Vancouver suggest that work on wildfire interface issues has the added benefit of bear proofing the community. For instance, clearing brush near buildings also removes covers for bears. Link wildfire interface work with preventive actions for wildlife management.

The City of Vancouver is developing a best practices manual for parks staff working around wildlife. The idea is to promote a wildlife ethic. This manual might help other agencies to do the "right thing" around wildlife. There may be an opportunity to post to the Web and for the city to collaborate more closely with other jurisdictions like GVRD Parks.

Continue to work on best management practices and protocols with the Agriculture industry. More common sense waste management practices to minimize conflicts with problem wildlife are required. Develop best management practices for fruit tree management.

Regulations

There is a wide range of suggestions to change hunting regulations. Hunting is seen as one tool in the toolbox to manage wildlife populations and reduce wildlife-human conflicts.

Universally mentioned in rural communities with hunters present at the meetings is for the province to remove the provision that requires hunters to remove the meat of black bear. It is widely believed this is a deterrent to black bear hunting and may also be leading to an over-population of black bears near many communities.

In a few meetings it is suggested that hunters be able to retrieve bear claws and perhaps even gall bladders. Government sanctioned trade in bear gall bladders was even suggested at one meeting.

Review the regulations around hunting cougars. Allow cougars to be classified as furbearers and trapped. Allow trappers to target cougars in areas where they are a problem and numbers are high.

Allow the trapping of cougars, bears and wolves in snares to reduce danger to people.

Free up hunting regulations for problem animals such as wolves or cougars where there are known threats to human safety.

Create special bear hunting zones in areas surrounding towns with serious black bear problems. In areas where populations are not at risk, increase the Limited Entry Hunt (LEH) for grizzly bears. In turn, the funds from the LEH be used to support the strategy and/or education programs.

More enforcement tools for municipalities are suggested. Whistler recommends pursuing the Attorney General to see if fines can be raised.

Whistler would like to pursue Deputy or Special Conservation Officer status for trained municipal staff to enforce some aspects of the *Wildlife Act* (e.g., a Dangerous Wildlife Protection Order). Vancouver Parks is also interested in pursuing discussions for staff to take on additional responsibilities for removal of problem coyotes. Authority for local governments to take further action for wildlife enforcement may involve changes to the *Wildlife Act* or the *Local Government Act*.

COS need the ability to ticket for wildlife offences under a "strict liability" provision. The current process of first proving intent to attract wildlife is too onerous.

The agriculture community asks that government license the BC Cattlemen's Association (BCCA) program to manage specified wildlife on crown land. This licence to delegate the authority from the province to the program manager to target and to destroy individual predators if and when necessary.

One issue identified at the Revelstoke meeting is managing properties and landowners outside of the city boundaries. The regional district does not have bylaws or bylaw enforcement officers. A suggestion is for the province to look at some way to force landowners to take steps to manage attractants.

Population Management

Population management is identified as a solution to reduce wildlife-human conflict. Communities and agencies believe that wildlife populations are very high, but there is lack of factual information in many cases. There is a need for better sharing of existing information on wildlife populations. And where there are gaps in information more research on what is happening with populations is needed.

Increasing predator populations and habitat reaching carrying capacity are key themes. The province and other agencies need good statistics to analyze these issues and propose solutions. If there are going to be steps to reduce populations using tools like hunting, then the province needs to have the numbers to back-up the decisions.

One of the challenges for the strategy is to reduce problem wildlife populations with hunting on the decline in BC. Several meetings point out that the province needs to do a better job of supporting hunting as a management tool. Part of the strategy may be making municipalities and others more aware of the range of hunting options available to manage wildlife.

The BC Trappers Association would like to be more actively involved in population management. It was pointed out that trappers do have the ability to remove wolves and other predator species. They could be utilized more frequently to manage problem populations.

Policy

A suggestion from the Terrace meeting is that COs never trap and relocate black bears. This allows the community to believe that they are not part of the problem—shooting bears in the community raises awareness of the issues.

If the province were willing to prosecute people for feeding dangerous wildlife, like the current Whistler case, this would go a long way to educating the public.

In general, municipalities view wildlife as a provincial jurisdiction. If there is going to be a change in policy for the municipalities to take on more responsibility then the *Wildlife Act* and other provincial and municipal regulations and policies may also need to be changed.

Enable others with the proper training and certification to do the work of the COS. For instance, the Mt. Currie Band suggested they would be interested in a native CO position.

There is some interest in the hazing of black bears by enforcement officers or parks staff outside of the ministry. Recommend that the ministry continue discussions with these agencies with a goal of putting some policy in place.

Develop policies to enable the COS to work with municipal bylaw enforcement officers to enforce attractant regulations. Furthermore funds from ticketing could be used as a funding mechanism by municipalities to put monies back into prevention programs.

Research

Research was another key theme that arose throughout the consultation. Suggestions range from supporting more work on black bear behavior to more research into the use of predator scents to scare elk from golf courses and highways.

There is wide interest in learning more about the bear-hazing project in Whistler.

Make the results of already existing research more available to agencies. The universal question asked at the community meetings where ICBC representatives were available, is do those wildlife whistles work? ICBC research shows that they are not effective but this information is not widely available.

What is really needed for communities is a cheap bear proof container for household use. Research into this should be supported.

Omineca suggest that the ministry encourage private companies to develop and implement automated garbage collection systems that are wildlife resistant. The province then to look at cost-sharing the implementation of systems with municipalities.

Support BC Rail and ICBC research work with the University of Northern BC into the timing and control of brushing along road and rail right-of-ways and the influences on moose and other ungulate species.

Conclusion

A few communities see little or no reason to move toward preventive solutions and a partnership, and suggest that the status quo will work for them.

In most communities and with most agencies contacted during the consultation there is a willingness to partner with the province on the wildlife-human conflict strategy.

Some agencies like GVRD Parks and the SPCA say they will require more information before they could commit to a partnership.

Other places like Revelstoke state they are willing to partner with the ministry and would like to move forward. Agencies like the BCCF and ICBC are actively seeking partnership. The BC Golf Superintendents Association is willing to partner with the province to reduce wildlife conflicts at golf courses. The BCCA are already undertaking actions to prevent conflicts.

Some agencies like the Kamloops Indian Band said they will continue to move forward on solutions to wildlife-human conflict with or without the ministry as it was the "right thing to do."

For the strategy to move forward it must find a flexible approach that will work in both urban and rural communities, and one that allows the ministry to meet its commitment to safe, healthy communities and a sustainable environment.